HARPER'S ASCENSION.

A REAL FOURTH OF JULY FAITHFULLY PORTRAYED.

"Harper Clelland is going up in the balloon on the Fourth of July."

The speaker was Lindley Custis, 14 years old. His only hearer was his sister Ada, who had the reputation of being the handsomest and proudest young lady in the somewhat uppish society of the self satisfied and prosperous town of Lafayette.

She received the news with an incredulous sneer.

The boy was well aware that his news was distasteful to his silent auditor. For that reason he was determined to compel belief. He had the proofs of his tale in his pocket, and he intended to enjoy to the full the displaying of it presently. Didn't he know all about her overwhelming pride, her love of the conventional things of life and her hatred of all that was original or peculiar? Had he not himself suffered because of her prejudices? When had he ever attempted anything outside the grim limits of the commonplace, that she had not rebuked him and made him feel small and ashamed? And didn't he know exactly why his news about Harper Clelland and the balloon was hateful to her? He was no fool, not he. Couldn't he see by certain sentimental straws which had been flying around recently just how the wind was blowing? The indications were towards a matrimonial harbor for his sister and Harper Clelland, or he was no prophet. And wasn't it fun alive to see Ada wince at the prospect of the whole town seeing her sweetheart go up in a balloon like a circus man? Revenge for many a rebuke lay within his hand, or rather his pocket.

"Don't believe it, sis, do you?" continued the boy sarcastically, his eyes dancing with wicked delight, his mischievous little soul rejoicing over the "clincher" he was about to draw forth. "Couldn't be true, of course. Mr. Clelland, Miss Custis' beau, is too great a swell to make a clown of himself, isn't he? As Miss Custis' beau he has too much dignity to sustain to dream of furnishing amusement for a Fourth of July crowd. That's your opinion, no doubt, Miss Custis; but it isn't mine. Harper Clelland is neither a fool nor a coward. And he is rich enough and popular enough to do anything. I have thought at times that he was something of a fool to be so fond of you, for as sure as snakes you don't appreciate the stuff that's in that fellow. He's clear grit. He isn't afraid to slap all Lafayette in the face by doing something that rich men's sons wouldn't dare to do—no, not one in a thousand of 'em. I hate rich men's sons, if I am one myself. Nearly all the boys that have anything in them are poor, and blamed if I don't feel sort of insignificant when I'm with them. If it wasn't that mother would take it hard I shouldn't care if Custis senior failed. Ungrateful, am I? Not a bit. I believe it would be good for all of us, you particularly. Perhaps you would then find out which one of your beaux was worth having. I'm no fogy. I am an advanced thinker, if you please; I believe in lots of new notions."

"You seem to have made remarkable progress," said Ada in icy tone.

"That's neither here nor there," said the boy. "It is Harper Clelland that I am speaking of. He is going up in the balloon, sure enough. I was around everywhere today, and heard all about it. Contract's signed, and he's under training. Professional aeronaut here already. I saw the balloon, flabby old thing; looks like an elephant that had collapsed. But here's the whole story in The Record."

"HERE'S THE WHOLE STORY IN THE RECORD."

With an impish gleam of pleasure in his eyes the boy drew a crisp copy of the city's most important journal from his pocket and read aloud the lines of a tremendous "horse head" which told in the boldest and blackest faced type in Lafayette that the young and handsome Harper Clelland would make an ascension from the court house yard on the Fourth of July in the balloon "W. S. Larkel," named in honor of the editor of The Record, who, with Mr. Clelland, from motives of patriotism, will pay the expenses of this, the city's first balloon ascension.

Lindley read the blazing head lines in a voice that admitted of no further doubt on the part of his hearer. Then followed a column or more of double leaded particulars of the highly dramatic event, as it was to be, in The Record's most conspicuous columns. Young Custis read every line of it aloud with diabolical joy, not unmixed with genuine admiration for the hero of the day.

Miss Custis heard it through in silence, but her face grew very hard and white, and her dark eyes blazed with wrath. Then, with a contemptuous laugh, which gurgled away into a snatch of song, to prove her indifference, she went out of the room. But her young tormentor was not deceived. "It grinds her like everything," he said to himself, and the thought seemed to give him extraordinary satisfaction, so high and fine a thing is brotherly affection at 14.

The whole town talked of young Clelland that evening. The richest, handsomest and most popular young gentleman in the community—it was generally admitted that he could do almost anything not positively criminal without losing caste—but a balloon ascension was a little too much for the "best people" to forgive. Lafayette was not scientific in its taste. It rather leaned to theology, and balloons were then supposed to owe their origin to theology's most powerful foe. Certain tea table circles doubted the propriety of letting their juvenile members see the evil thing go up. They scented condemnation in the air. Nothing but the license of the immortal Fourth could mitigate so wide a departure from decorum. But Liberty looses her stays on that historic day and breathes with ease, and everybody tacitly agrees that she has a right to comport herself fantastically if she chooses to do so.

Some of the matrons of Lafayette said that if Harper Clelland's mother was alive this balloon escapade of his would never take place. But he had had his own way always. His father was traveling in Europe, and was the kind of man anyway who never cared a raveling for the opinion of others, if he was in the right. And wasn't Harper just like him? Fearless to the point of recklessness he never counted the cost, never even thought of what "they" would say. But was he not, with all his recklessness, the manliest, most noble hearted young man in the whole state? So gentle and courteous to the humble as well as to the rich, yet always so brave and strong. The most polished and best informed of all the beaux known to Lafayette, too. The younger youths looked up to him in envy and admiration, for he was a graduate of one of the best colleges and had traveled abroad, two glorious achievements not common in Lafayette in that early day. And he certainly had a taste for science. As a civil engineer he had already made a fair start. The few who knew him best said that his promised balloon ascension was not inspired by any vulgar love of notoriety. He wanted to make the trip because of the experience, and because he was anxious to treat Lafayette to a novelty on the patriots' own day. It would cost him ever so much money, too, they said; for he and Mr. Larkell, of The Record, were paying for it all.

So the excellent people of Lafayette talked it over, lamented it, hoped he would change his mind and so on; but he was too great a social figure for any one of them to snub, even if he went up in a balloon every day.

The Custis homestead stood on a hill overlooking the town. That evening as Harper Clelland was walking toward it he came suddenly upon a man and woman resting under a tree at the foot of the long hill. Their figures were but dimly outlined in the twilight shadows, but he saw that they were not of his town. They were gypsies.

Three or four stars glimmered in the heavens, and the disc of the full moon rose slowly over the edge of the horizon, like the sunny face of a chubby child peeping over a wall. A night bird shrieked and flew from the tree as the young man approached.

The woman leaned against the tree, bareheaded. The moonlight shone upon her dark face, in which blazed a pair of eyes like stars. A bright shawl was wound about her shoulders and waist, her arms were half bare, and her short skirt revealed a pair of shapely ankles and trim but dusty shoes. The man, all fringe and color, lay upon the ground at her feet.

A magnificent stage picture, thought Clelland, as he approached. The man sprang to his feet with a noiseless, cat like movement, and in very bad English asked Clelland to tell him the name of the best doctor in town. As he spoke he pointed up the hill, where a train of gorgeous wagons containing the gypsy's people was slowly descending.

Clelland was of the order of men who are at home anywhere, and make everybody else at ease in their presence. At once he became a figure in the scene quite in interior and exterior harmony with the others. Who so well as he knew how to avoid showing any astonishment at sight of the unexpected strangers? Who had so much delicacy in all relations with others? Who so entirely without that curiosity of manner which is the expression of ineradicable vulgarity?

The gypsy asked about the town, the roads, the country, and wondered if there could be any objection to his people camping for a few days in the grove to the left. Clelland was the owner of the land, and he at once gave the necessary permission. Then the gypsy told him of the sick man in the first wagon, and how vain had been all the medical knowledge of his tribe in his case, how they wanted the best physician that could be had as speedily as possible, and they had the gold to pay his price, too.

The wagons rolled near. The man went to the roadside and directed them to the site of the camp, and repeated the information he had just obtained about the doctor.

Hitherto the woman had leaned against the tree in silence. Now she stepped forward, saying in good English:

"You are so kind. May I not show you that we are thankful? Let me take your hand and tell your fortune—something good, I hope. You deserve it."

She was young and comely. Her voice was low, her words very sweet.

"If it pleases you," he said, extending his hand.

She took it and led him out of the shadow of the tree, where the moon shone over them in its full glory, for already it had climbed above the horizon fence and was looking down at them with a big half comic, half sad smile. The wagons rumbled into the grove and the gypsy man returned and threw himself on the ground under the tree.

The dark eyed palmist bent her head over the young man's hand and looked at it intently for several minutes. Then suddenly gazing into his frank eyes, she said:

"I am sorry that so brave and gentle a heart has not a fairer fortune. Your star of luck is even now clouding. To-night you will lose your love. She will meet you with anger and will part from you with bitter words, which will never be sweetened in this life."

The prophecy of evil always moves us, in spite of our skepticism. Who shall say that words are not potent for good and ill?

"Not now, but in the future," continued the palmist, "you will bless her anger. A better love will yet be yours—indeed, is yours now, though you know it not. Before you lies a valley of Pain, into which the hand of Folly

"TO-NIGHT YOU WILL LOSE YOUR LOVE."

will lead you, and out of which you will be conducted by the Angel of Truth. On your twenty-ninth birthday you will be the victim of an accident which will color your whole life. Be careful! Be careful! But at last out of sorrow will come peace, out of disappointment, happiness."

At this moment two shadows fell on the white sand of the road, and in a second more the figures that cast them paused beside the palmist and her subject. One was Nettie Bankard, a young girl who earned her bread by sewing at the houses of the rich. The other was Lindley Custis, the irrepressible brother of Miss Ada. He was escorting Nettie home after her day's work was done, and seemed rather proud of his mission. He was her fervent admirer, and often told his sister that if Nettie Bankard had half a chance she would "throw her (Ada) in the shade" in the matter of beauty and popularity.

Clelland greeted her with genial courtesy. The gypsy woman looked at her with decided interest. The young man laughingly told her that he had just had his fortune told, and that he was to be unlucky in love and have a lot of trouble on his twenty-ninth birthday.

He did not see, but the star eyed gypsy did, that the dreamy, yearning face of the young girl grew rigid and white as she listened.

"When is your twenty-ninth birthday, Mr. Clelland?" questioned Nettie, with the simplicity of a child, but with eyes full of intense interest.

"When? Oh, in a few days—on the Fourth of July. I was born a patriot, you see. The spirit of independence comes natural to me."

The girl looked at him with an expression in which there was greater anguish than words could translate. But he did not see it.

As Nettie walked away the gypsy woman, with her eyes fixed dreamily upon her, said softly to herself: "We meet them at the foot of weary hills and in lonely byways and know them not. Yet, as surely as the coming of the morning, will be the awakening, and we shall know them as our own."

Two hours later Harper Clelland was leaving the door of the Custis home. The handsome face of Miss Custis was white with wrath, as she bade him good night and good-by. A few paces from the steps he turned and looked at her as she stood on the balcony, her white gown glinting through the green vines, her dark eyes burning with anger. His heart swelled with pain. He loved her well; but she had told him to go away and come back no more. The balloon was the enemy that had done this. Clelland emphatically anathematized it as he stood there, even while remaining loyal to it.

"I am not to come again?" he said inquiringly, hoping, lover like, that she would relent at the last minute. "We are to be nothing to each other hereafter?"

"Nothing," she answered, with the quiet emphasis peculiar to heartless people.

He walked away hurling mental invectives at the balloon, and curses, they say, rebound against the one who utters them. There is a philosophy abroad now which holds that a curse, even an unspoken one, damages its object, but damages its utterer still more.

Preparations for the great day went on briskly. Speeches, music, a dinner, a procession, the firing of cannon and, most of all, the balloon, were to make that particular Fourth of July glorious and memorable. Patriotism was to walk forth in continental purity. Freedom was to shriek as much as it pleased. The eagle was to soar, and independence to renew its youth.

"NOTHING TO EACH OTHER HEREAFTER?"

The morning of the Fourth came at last, though half the male children of Lafayette doubted that it ever would. Citizens of the surrounding country chased the sun into the town. Young and old they came, determined that nothing so fantastic, not to say demoniac, as a balloon should leave the earth without their seeing it. All went to look at the irreligious thing as it lay a limp mass in the court house yard, guarded by the professional aeronaut, and hovered over by swarms of boys.

How exciting was the business of inflating it. Every other attraction lost interest as the work went on. Drinking glasses grew dry as powder horns on the lemonade stands. The dealers in ginger bread and early apple pies recklessly left their posts in subordinate hands and drew near the throng of patriotic humanity which surrounded the court house yard like a broad and breathing wall.

The balloon, fastened to its guy ropes, and receiving the gas which was to bear it upward, was sighing and floundering like an impatient animal, anxious to be off. At last all was ready. The ropes were put into the hands of stalwart patriots, five and six to each rope. Then the professional balloonist who had "bossed the job" addressed the breathless populace in the feelingless and penetrating voice of a ring master.

Harper Clelland then stepped out from a group of interested assistants, nodded right and left to his friends, gracefully touched his hat to the people and sprang into the balloon's basket.

At this point all Lafayette opened its throat concertedly and expressed its patriotism and admiration. The cheer was mighty and prolonged. Nettie Bankard, sitting on the door step of her mother's tiny cottage, looking upward in expectant agony, heard it and knew that the dreadful hour had come. Never before had she so clearly realized that the body was the prison of the spirit. She longed unutterably for wings, that she might fly to that fearful thing which was bearing her heart's hero away from the earth into danger and perhaps death.

Secretly, from her humble sphere, she looked up to, loved and worshiped the daring young man who was to sail into space "to make an American holiday." Not a soul that breathed knew of this ponderous secret. The man she loved did not even dream of it. And yet, in her heart, she believed that somehow, in some silent mysterious way, her love would go forth and bless its object. Who can prove that her belief, born of the spirit which creates and peoples worlds, was not founded upon an eternal truth?

The silence of death fell over the crowd as the order was given to clear the ropes and let the balloon go upward. The wonderful carriage of the air shot up, but not straight to the sky. The over excited men at one of the ropes held on some seconds after the others had let go. This made the balloon lurch earthward on one side as it rose. Striking a corner of the court house a rent was torn in its bulging side, and its flight at once doomed.

The swarming people below saw the ruin that had been wrought and its possible direful consequences, and terror took the place of interest, parching their tongues and paralyzing their limbs.

For a few minutes the young man in the basket did not know [illegible]. The balloon [illegible] missing the gas that [illegible] gaping side.

Standing erect he waved his hand gayly to the sea of upturned faces. Then the great ball above him trembled, lurched and began to falter in its flight. The people watched him with bated breath. The stoutest of them groaned, the weakest wept. Their strained eyes saw the balloon limp through the air, now falling, then sighing and rising a little again, then floundering to the right or the left. A mile east of the town it lost all its life, and with a sudden collapse sank toward the earth. Brushing over the tops of trees, it trailed off into empty space and was lost to sight.

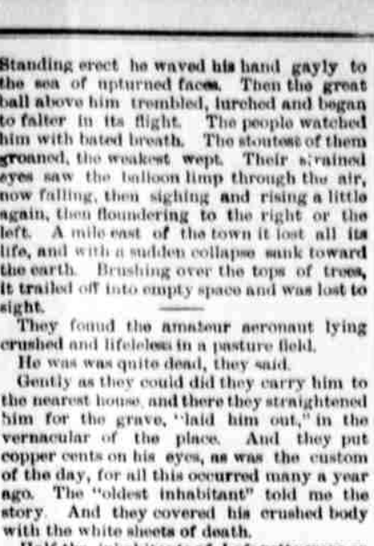
They found the amateur aeronaut lying crushed and lifeless in a pasture field.

He was was quite dead, they said.

Gently as they could did they carry him to the nearest house, and there they straightened him for the grave, "laid him out," in the vernacular of the place. And they put copper cents on his eyes, as was the custom of the day, for all this occurred many a year ago. The "oldest inhabitant" told me the story. And they covered his crushed body with the white sheets of death.

Half the inhabitants of Lafayette were on the spot almost as soon as Clelland was found. Among the number was Nettie Bankard, who had fairly flown over the ground, urged on by love, which in the moment of danger forgot to be shy. Nobody wondered why she was there, since almost everybody was there.

It so happened that as the unfortunate day waned she stood on the porch looking into the room of death then left solitary. As she



SHOT UP, BUT NOT STRAIGHT.

looked with the gaze of the soul rather than the eyes, she fancied that the long figure on the board moved. It was a fancy, of course, she told herself. But surely the white sheet shook. In a bound the girl was in the room tearing the covering from the face of the man she loved.

Then was there an excitement greater than that aroused by his fall from the clouds, for lo! he was alive. Yes, alive; but crushed and mangled in body most pitiably. When the news reached Lafayette the grateful town expressed its joy by firing cannon and sending up the sky rockets which had been forbidden when the amateur balloonist was supposed to be dead.

Bad as the accident was for Clelland, it had its divine uses. But for it he never would have married Nettie Bankard, an event in his life which has blessed him ever since. The wedding took place the next day after the accident, being the direct result of it, in fact. Clelland read the love in the girl's eyes when he came back to consciousness. Seeing him suffering, she forgot to hide it. Remembering that he was rich and she poor, and believing that he could benefit her by his wealth, and also that his days were too few to be a care upon her, he asked the privilege of becoming her husband.

Even the long, long months that passed before his broken body was made whole were not wasted. He thought out an invention which brought him still greater wealth. Better still, he thought out a nobler philosophy of life. Guided by an inner light, newly born in his soul, he expended for others the money his genius had earned. He is an elderly man now, as patriotic as ever, still a resident of Lafayette, and the greatest philanthropist in the state.

Ada Custis married a rich and respectable president of a savings bank. He had never done anything so disreputable as to "go up in a balloon," therefore she felt that her pride was safe from mortification. So it was for several years; but one day the bank closed suddenly and the banker hurried off to Europe without bidding his family or friends adieu, and has never been heard of in Lafayette since. Ada and her children would have had a sorry time of it had it not been for her brother Lindley, who "turned out splendidly," the people of Lafayette say. You have heard of him, I am sure, one of the broadest minded men in the country and one of the best. But he is quite as radical as he promised to be at fourteen.

GERTRUDE GARRISON.

"In the Good Old Times."

In the "good old times before the war" a man who had served in any kind of an army anywhere was a live curiosity in many sections of the United States; and in nine-tenths of the towns and villages a cannon had never been seen. Indeed, the possession of an old six pounder rendered even a small city famous; and if some smith could be found to stretch his conscience far enough to inscribe such a gun with the legend that it was "Captured at Monterey" or thereabouts, people came twenty miles to see it fired off on Independence Day.

A BRILLIANT SUCCESS.

The small boy had his fun, however; the patriot his powder boom—with knotty logs in which holes had been bored and filled with powder, or similar devices. But the favorite "piece of ordnance" consisted of two anvils, so placed as to make the square depressions match, thus making a large cavity to be filled with powder. When all was set the "artillerist" took a long iron rod, one end of which had been heated in a convenient fire, and touched the priming; there was a flash, a stunning report, and the upper anvil rose grandly, while the patriotic yell made the blood thrill. This was repeated for the number of states, and if no one got "powder burnt" the demonstration was counted a brilliant success.